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ABSTRACT

This is a report on Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges' assistance of low-income adults under the state's welfare reform initiative, WorkFirst. Current and former welfare students attending community and technical colleges comprise 9% of all college student enrollments. Combining work and training leads to higher wages. WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs are aimed at quick-starting employment, providing access and support to training for low-income working adults, and increasing literacy skills. The report looks at lessons learned from WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs in the following areas: general, program re-design, tuition assistance, pre-employment training, workplace basics, families that work, and evening and weekend child care. Early outcomes in programs that quick-started employment with custom training confirms that connecting training to job opportunities results in higher wages than job search alone, and is promising for other low-income students that colleges serve. Under WorkFirst, welfare and low-income workers with low basic skills are being served in new ways that streamline training by instructing basic skills in the context of a single parent's dual roles and responsibilities, as worker and head of family. The college system implemented tuition assistance for low-income working adults and is following their progress towards certificates and degrees. WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs have started to change the ways colleges provide training and services to welfare and other low-income working adults. (VWC)

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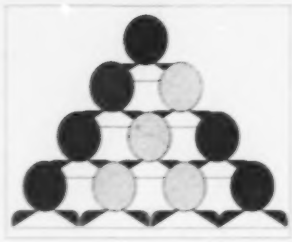

**Research Report No. 99-6**

**Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Education Division**

# Preparing Welfare and Other Low-Income Adults for Work and Better Jobs: A Report on Low-Income Students Enrolled in Colleges and the Start-Up of WorkFirst Programs

December 1999

## Introduction

Washington's Community and Technical Colleges have a long history of serving low-income adults, including welfare recipients who have received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (welfare), Aid For Dependent Children (AFDC), or Refugee Assistance. In 1998-99, 35,000 current and former welfare recipients sought training at their local community and technical college.

For the past year, the college system has been engaged in implementing new programs to serve current and former welfare recipients along with other low-income working adults (earning less than 175 percent of poverty) under the state's welfare reform initiative, WorkFirst. WorkFirst Reinvestment Funds were used to augment the colleges' existing activities by providing targeted training to give a "quick start" to employment, improved literacy, and the access and support services which low-income working adults need to succeed in school.

The WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs are integral to the state's strategies to promote self-sufficiency for welfare recipients. They provide initial job placement and follow that with further job training for wage progression. The challenge of providing WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs helps improve the colleges' programs for all low-income students attending for work and employment goals.

**Current and Former Welfare Students Attending Community and Technical Colleges Comprise Nine Percent of All College Student Enrollments.**

Current and former welfare students comprise a significant part of all college headcount enrollments.

- 35,000 current and former welfare recipients enrolled in community and technical colleges in 1998-99. These students were 9 percent of all college enrollments (headcount).
- Some 10,000 other non-welfare, low-income parents not currently or formerly on welfare (in the past seven years) also attended colleges for employment-related goals in 1998-99.

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**All Current and Former Welfare Students**
**Headcount Enrollments**

| | 1997-98 | 1998-99 |
|---|---|---|
| Total Headcount for Current and Former Welfare Enrolled | 39,000 | 35,000 |
| Former Welfare Only | 14,600 | 15,500 |

## Combining Work and Training Leads to Higher Wages

Twenty-six percent of the current and former welfare students enrolled in 1998-99 worked while attending--an increase of 3 percent over the year before. Research for 6,000 welfare students who left vocational training programs between 1994 and 1996 provides a picture of the roles of training for welfare recipients:

- Welfare students who completed their training earned higher hourly wages seven to nine months after training than those who dropped out early.
- Welfare students who combined training and work earned higher hourly wages seven to nine months after training than those that did not combine training and work.
- Welfare students who worked with the same employer during and after training earned higher hourly wages seven to nine months after training than those who changed employers.
- Regardless of whether work and training were combined, those who completed training in high-wage programs earned the most after college.

**Wage Results Seven to Nine Months After Training for Welfare Students 1994-96**

| | Not Employed During Last Quarter | Employed During Last Quarter |
|---|---|---|
| Left Training Before Completing | $7.82 | $8.85 |
| Completed Training | $9.45 | $10.10 |
| Stayed With Same Employer After Training | | $10.29 |
| Completed High Wage Training | $13.09 | $13.04 |

**WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs aimed at quick-starting employment, providing access and support to training for low-income working adults, and increasing literacy skills.**

- Colleges set a target in 1998-99 to train 9,100 WorkFirst Reinvestment participants and to redesign college programs and services for them.

- The start up was slower than colleges expected. However, by the fourth quarter, the system enrolled 6,600 participants and achieved 73 percent of its overall target.

- 2,600 of these participants were current welfare grant recipients; another 1,000 formerly received welfare grants, and were low-wage workers. The remaining 3,000 were other low-income workers (earning less than 175 percent of poverty in 1998-99) who had never received welfare in the past.

**Budget Summary for WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs**

DSHS contracted with the SBCTC for Reinvestment programs and services. In addition, the state legislature appropriated $1 million for tuition assistance. SBCTC allocated these funds based on plans and applications submitted by colleges and private providers. Every application and plan is co-signed by local agency and employer partners. Payment was based upon actual expenditures.

Budget summary:

| | |
|---|---|
| Total Budget | $18,263,000 |
| Allocated by SBCTC | $14,863,000 |
| Expended | $10,080,000 |

## Lessons Learned from WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs

| | |
|---|---|
| **General** | ➢ WorkFirst Reinvestment training programs and services were more complex and took longer to implement than colleges anticipated.<br>➢ Participants needed far greater help accessing training and more support to stay in training than anticipated.<br>➢ Strong partnerships with other WorkFirst agencies were critical. |
| **Program Re-Design**<br><br>Funding for colleges to develop programs and services that make it easier for WorkFirst and low-income working students to attend and succeed in college. | ➢ All colleges hired staff to work with participants, assisting them with career planning, enrollment, and student support.<br>➢ Most promising practices focused on working with students individually, rather than as a group.<br>➢ 171 classes were redesigned. |
| **Tuition Assistance**<br><br>Quick start assistance for tuition and books for employed WorkFirst participants and other low-wage workers. | ➢ More successful serving former welfare and other non-welfare, low-income workers than serving working welfare adults.<br>➢ Also difficult to serve seasonal workers.<br>➢ More evening instruction needed. |
| **Pre-Employment Training**<br><br>Short-term training with employers, who commit to giving first consideration to hiring those who complete. Employment opportunities have above entry-level wages and typically include benefits. | ➢ Enrollment target set too high, did not anticipate students difficulty finding out about training programs.<br>➢ Wage results are further evidence that training combined with work works for targeted groups. |
| **Workplace Basics**<br><br>Literacy training for low-wage workers in entry-level jobs; customized for specific workplaces and typically provided at the work site. | ➢ High employer and worker satisfaction.<br>➢ Difficult to serve working welfare unless tied to pre-employment training.<br>➢ Difficult to serve small businesses spread across the state. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Families That Work**<br><br>Prepares parents with low basic skills for work by combining literacy instruction with family management skills to resolve issues that often prevent single parents from succeeding in school or work. | ➢ Focused on hard-to-serve.<br><br>➢ Participants needed at least 6 months of intensive participation to show improvements and assimilate skills.<br><br>➢ Best practices can benefit low-income parents enrolled in other basic skills classes. |
| **Evening and Weekend Child Care**<br><br>Pilot programs for evening and weekend child care for WorkFirst participants attending colleges. | ➢ Seven colleges participated. Usage grew when parents had advance time to plan and schedule.<br><br>➢ All colleges were surveyed for more planning information--results available end of September. |

**Conclusions**

Combining training with work results in better wages for welfare students. The WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs make this a formal training pathway for most welfare participants. Providing access to training and services to support low-income working students so they can complete has become more critical to high wage success.

Early outcomes in programs that quick-started employment with custom training confirms that connecting training to job opportunities results in higher wages than job search alone, and is promising for other low-income students that colleges serve.

Under WorkFirst, welfare and low-income workers with low basic skills are being served in new ways that streamline training by instructing basic skills in the context of a single parent's dual roles and responsibilities, as worker and head of a family.

The college system implemented tuition assistance for low-income working adults and is following their progress towards certificates and degrees. Colleges have also begun to redesign programs and courses for delivery to working students. Implementation of the redesigned courses in the next year will be important to meeting the demand for evening and weekend instruction. Also, next year colleges have proposed ways to increase access for the WorkFirst students they are still finding difficult to serve.

WorkFirst Reinvestment Programs have started to change the ways colleges provide training and services to welfare and other low-income working adults. Overall, first year implementation was more complicated than anticipated, however, colleges remain committed to the program goals.

Finally, in March 2000, SBCTC will present a First Annual Accountability Report for the Reinvestment Programs for training and employment results, based upon administrative records and UI matches for employment and earnings.

## Program Redesign and Delivery

Program Redesign and Delivery provides funding for colleges to develop programs and services that make it easier for WorkFirst and low-income working students to attend and succeed in college. These funds have been used to design shorter classes; increase evening and weekend offerings; hire staff to provide advising and career planning; and develop working relationships with business and agency partners.

**Budget summary:**

| | |
|---|---|
| DSHS Contract Amount | $4,200,000 |
| SBCTC Allocated to Colleges | $4,100,000 |
| College Expenditures | $3,300,000 |

**How funds were allocated:**

Each college worked with local agency partners to develop a plan to redesign programs and services to better meet the needs of WorkFirst participants. Colleges were allocated $109,000 to $149,000 based upon on the size of the WorkFirst population in the colleges' district and the quality of the redesign plan. Colleges were reimbursed after the plans were implemented.

**Results:**

- Across the state, 171 courses were redesigned to meet the learning needs of WorkFirst participants. Short-term training programs and courses have been developed to prepare call center specialists, bus drivers, warehouse forklift operators, office workers, nursing assistants, automotive technicians, and other positions. Many colleges offer short-term training in computer skills, including introductory courses and specific software applications.

- Fifty of the courses that were redesigned were ready to offer by winter and spring quarters in 1998-99. The others are ready for adaptation and implementation this year.

- Program Redesign and Delivery funds were used to hire WorkFirst Coordinators on each college campus. They provide direct services to WorkFirst participants, assisting them with career planning, enrollment, student support, and connecting them with services at other agencies. These direct services are proving key to the success of college efforts to provide education and training to current and former welfare recipients.

**Lessons learned:**

- Strong partnerships with other WorkFirst agencies are critical to assisting and supporting participants.
- Colleges spent this first year building the services, courses, and staff. They learned that dedicated staff must be available on campuses to support participants.
- The most promising practices focused on students individually rather than as a group. For example, college staff worked with agency partners to review progress of individuals on a regular basis and develop wage progression plans that included training.
- Evening and weekend instruction continues to be a need as redesigned courses have just started to be offered.

**What the future holds:**

- WorkFirst will continue to be labor intensive and colleges will require dedicated staffing.
- SBCTC expects that as redesigned courses are implemented, they will meet more of the demand for evening and weekend classes. Implementation of courses redesigned last year will be part of the plan review this year.

## Tuition Assistance

Tuition Assistance provides tuition and books to employed WorkFirst participants and other low-wage workers. Traditional financial aid isn't available for students taking short-term programs or enrolled for fewer than 10 credits. This program also provides short-term assistance for students who will eventually qualify for assistance under the federal and state programs.

**Budget summary:**

| | |
|---|---|
| DSHS Contracted Amount | $4,000,000 |
| State Appropriated | $1,000,000 |
| SBCTC Allocated to Colleges | $5,000,000 |
| College Expenditures | $3,100,000 |

How funds were allocated:

DSHS contracted $4 million to the SBCTC. In addition, the state legislature appropriated $1 million for tuition assistance. Colleges were allocated funds based upon an estimate of how many eligible participants were in each community. By mid-year, some colleges had used all of their funds, but others had used as little as 25 percent. Funds were shifted to the communities that needed them most, with final allocations ranging from $51,000 to $258,000 per college.

**Cumulative participants per quarter:**

- College responses varied with colleges reaching between 23 and 244 percent of their projected enrollment targets.
- Many colleges were initially conservative in making awards, unsure if there would be sufficient aid available.

**Results:**

- 51 percent of the participants were current or former welfare recipients. The others were low-income working adults.
- Over half took at least one evening or weekend class.

- 1,200 participants (28 percent) earned at least 10 credits or completed a short training plan by June 1999.[1] These participants will be matched to UI records this winter for employment and earnings information. SBCTC will continue to match student records as long as the participants are retained in training. The expectation is that wage progression will be greatest for those who ultimately complete.

- The system will continue to follow those who haven't reached the 10-credit threshold yet, monitoring their retention in college.

**Lessons learned:**

- Colleges had little difficulty serving low-wage workers, including many who were former welfare recipients, but current working welfare participants were more difficult to reach. Two factors that contributed to this problem were the lack of wage progression planning done with welfare adults in local DSHS and ES offices and the lack of local DSHS/ES targets for working welfare adults in training.

- Colleges in rural areas found it difficult to serve seasonal workers. These individuals must work as many hours as possible when jobs are available, but have no opportunities for training during off-peak periods in the year under the current policy.

**What the future holds:**

- Colleges are committed to serving 5,000 Tuition Assistance participants in 1999-2000. They expect to reach this goal through strong outreach to participants and employers in pre-employment programs before and when they start work, and more referrals from partner agencies based upon local targets for working welfare adults in training.

- Balancing school, work, and family is an extraordinary challenge for many welfare recipients. Colleges have requested to extend Tuition Assistance eligibility to welfare students participating in work-study jobs.

- Colleges have also requested to extend Tuition Assistance to welfare students participating in internships in high wage training programs. Past welfare students earned a median wage of over $13 per hour seven to nine months after completing high wage training programs.

- To better serve seasonal workers, the colleges have proposed allowing participants to "bank" work hours and enroll in training during off-peak periods.

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[1]SBCTC evaluates the results of workforce training programs for all students who complete or leave programs after earning a minimum of 10 credits. SBCTC is applying the 10-credit threshold as the launch point for following the wage progression for participants who receive Tuition Assistance.

## Pre-Employment Training

WorkFirst and low-income participants receive short-term training to learn the skills they need to work in a particular field. Colleges and private institutions develop these training programs with employers, who commit to giving first consideration to hiring those who complete the training. Employment opportunities have above entry-level wages and typically include benefits.

**Budget summary:**

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|---|---|
| DSHS Contracted Amount | $7 million |
| SBCTC Allocated to Providers | $3,950,000 |
| Expenditures | $2,500,000 |

**How providers were selected:**

Funds were awarded based on an application. Colleges and private institutions developed applications in partnership with employers, DSHS, and ES. Only applications that met the wage and training criteria, had the appropriate partners, and were reasonably budgeted, were funded. Twenty-six providers were awarded funds ranging from $32,000 to $534,000. Remaining funds were held in reserve to be awarded as eligible proposals were submitted. Providers were reimbursed for actual expenditures after delivering the training.

**Cumulative participants per quarter:**

**Results**:

- 23 colleges and 3 private institutions provided 51 programs with over 250 employers for 1,069 participants.

- Three-quarters of participants in training programs that ended this year completed the training, and college coordinators reported that two-thirds of those completing found jobs in the industry for which they trained.

- Coordinators reported 50 percent of those hired after a pre-employment training program had a starting hourly wage of $7.50 or higher. This compares to 28 percent at $7.50 or higher for all other working welfare adults statewide. Participants who completed or left training by June 30, 1999 will be matched to UI files in March for employment and earning outcomes.

- Pre-employment programs typically included basic skills instruction and basic job skills, customized to the partner business and industry needs. The $7.50/hr median wage for pre-employment training participants that were hired after completion was also better than the median hourly wages for past welfare basic skills students ($6.89) and for welfare students who leave vocational training before completing the program ($7.28).

**Lessons learned:**

- The college system fell short of its goal for pre-employment training. Several factors caused this: finalization of the DSHS contract was delayed; a lack of timely referrals delayed implementation for some programs; and many referrals were not qualified for the training.

- The system was successful in finding employer partners. Connecting the training to employers paid off in higher wages for participants who completed compared to other working welfare adults statewide.

- Smaller programs for 8-15 participants typically were more successful than larger programs in enrolling participants in a timely manner and placing them in jobs. Some colleges formed consortia to offer training for groups of employers or employers hiring at multiple sites.

- Colleges found that adding basic skills to programs streamlined the training period and resulted in better outcomes when compared to typical welfare students with similar characteristics.

**What the future holds:**

- Colleges estimate that 1,200 participants will be trained in 1999-2000. This is a significant reduction from the first-year projection but is considered a realistic goal.

- Colleges have implemented an individual referral component, which allows one or two participants to join an existing training program with a link to a specific employer upon completion.

## Workplace Basics

Workplace Basics provides literacy training to low-wage workers in entry-level jobs with a goal of wage and skill progression. Basic skills training is customized for specific workplaces and workers. The training is typically provided at the work site.

**Budget summary:**

| | |
|---|---|
| DSHS Contracted Amount | $1 million |
| SBCTC Allocated | $672,000 |
| Expended | $505,000 |

**How providers were selected:**

Funds were awarded through an application process open to colleges, private non-profit organizations, and employers. Actual expenditures were reimbursed after the training was delivered.

**Cumulative enrollments per quarter:**

Enrollments: In Workplace Basics, an employee may re-enroll for a subsequent training cycle. Cumulative enrollments shown are unduplicated; the duplicated total including re-enrollments is 837 workers.

**Results:**

- Workplace Basics served 753 workers in 42 businesses. Twelve colleges and seven private non-profit organizations participated. Non-profits included the Refugee Resettlement Office, Fremont Public Association, and Tacoma Goodwill.
- Over 80 percent of the participants are receiving English as a Second Language instruction. The others are studying basic math, reading, and communication skills.
- 85 percent of those instructed demonstrated measurable improvements in their basic skills.
- In a survey of 650 workers, nearly all said they used their training on the job. Seventy percent said they used what they learned "very often".

- In a companion survey of almost 90 supervisors, supervisors reported that increased worker self-confidence was the greatest area of success for their company. Other successful results were in productivity, worker relationships, and worker adaptation. Nearly half of the supervisors also reported successes in worker safety and opportunities for advancement.

- In January, participants will be matched to UI files to gather more information about their employment and earnings during and after participation.

**Lessons learned:**

- Partnering with employers to instruct low-wage workers in basics skills on their job sites resulted in higher enrollments than targeted. However, the enrollments were concentrated with three providers.

- One program followed welfare workers from pre-employment training onto their new jobs. This was a promising way to reach current welfare participants that are working. However, most providers found it difficult to serve working welfare participants. State level employment information provided by ES was not targeted to this particular type of worker, and difficult to use for employer outreach.

- Although the demand for Workplace Basics far exceeded the initial target, more opportunities can be provided in additional communities throughout the state and more small businesses included.

**What the future holds:**

- Overall, this program will continue to experience significant growth, serving more participants and employers across the state.

- SBCTC will ensure that providers make connections to pre-employment employers to follow working welfare participants into the workplace and that focus is given to serving more employers statewide, including small businesses.

- The new Limited English Proficiency Pathway may also provide a means to target employers who hire welfare participants.

## Families That Work

Families That Work (FTW) prepares parents with low basic skills for work by combining literacy instruction with family management skills, such as parenting, time management, arranging child care, coping with transportation problems, and other issues that often prevent single parents from succeeding in school or work. The providers work closely with local DSHS offices to tailor services to meet local needs. Participants who are not ready for WorkFirst job search and immediate employment can improve their skills, leading to better job opportunities.

**Budget summary:**

| | |
|---|---|
| DSHS Contracted Amount | $1 million |
| SBCTC Allocated to Providers | $733,000 |
| Expenditures | $632,000 |

**How providers were selected:**

Family literacy programs funded by the Office of Adult Literacy were invited to submit proposals for Families That Work. Of the 20 programs, 16 made proposals and 15 were funded. Awards ranged from $29,000 to $103,000. Actual expenditures were paid after the program was delivered.

**Cumulative participants per quarter:**

**Results:**

- Thirteen family literacy programs at community and technical colleges and two at community-based organizations provided Families That Work programs.
- Providers served 571 participants.

- 90 percent of the participants that completed at least six months of training demonstrated better skills in managing family and personal responsibilities and increased preparation for work or job training.

- 45 percent advanced to a work experience position, or got or retained a job. In January, SBCTC will match FTW participants to UI files for further employment and earnings outcomes.

**Lessons learned:**

- Having enough time in Families That Work to assimilate and apply the skills being learned was important to the success of participants. The typical woman enrolled in Families That Work after an unsuccessful job search or being assessed by a caseworker as not ready to seek immediate employment. She was able to make measurable gains in basic skills, applying what she learned to her roles as mother and breadwinner, if she participated in the program 20-25 hours a week for at least six months.

- Providers found that many participants will need job training after Families That Work to get jobs.

- Programs were cost effective, exceeding enrollment targets while underspending available dollars.

**What the future holds:**

- As policymakers focus on stable families and the welfare of children, the FTW model is increasingly recognized for its holistic approach.

- Continued growth is expected for Families That Work. The model will be extended to family literacy sites throughout the state. The holistic approach in Families That Work will also benefit pregnant women and mothers with infants under the new Pregnancy-to-Employment program.

- Providers want to make stronger connections with pre-employment programs, a proposed work-study program, and the Limited English Proficiency Pathway to help FTW participants move on to training that will prepare them for better jobs at higher wages.

- Many more low-income parents in college basic skills programs can benefit from lessons being learned in Families That Work. Best practices need to be followed and integrated into these programs.

## Evening and Weekend Child Care

Many WorkFirst participants attending college critically need child care, particularly during evenings and weekends. Twenty-eight community and technical colleges have on-campus child care. Twenty-three run the centers themselves, while five have contracted with operators. Only two colleges provide child care outside the traditional hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Through WorkFirst Reinvestment funds, SBCTC created a pilot program for evening and weekend child care.

**Current child care capacity on campus:**

The typical center serves 60 children, although some centers are licensed to serve as few as 20 children and others may serve as many as 130.

Most centers provide care exclusively for children who are 18 months to 6 years of age. Eight provide infant care (children younger than one year), and ten colleges provide care for children 6 to 12 years old.

Many centers are full and maintain a waiting list for parents who want to enroll their children. However, several colleges have discontinued the waiting lists because space rarely becomes available after the start of the quarter.

A 1996 survey of campus child care directors indicated unique problems with evening and weekend child care:

- Colleges were not able to offer care during non-traditional times because they lack consistent funding to cover fixed costs associated with these services.
- A lack of child care during non-traditional hours was a major barrier to students enrolling in evening and weekend training programs and basic skills instruction.

**Pilot Projects:**

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|---|---|
| DSHS Contracted Amount | $63,000 |
| SBCTC Allocated to Colleges | $63,000 |
| College Expenditures | $42,400 |

**How colleges were selected:**

In December 1998, the SBCTC received 11 proposals through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Seven were selected to participate in the pilot: Centralia, Clover Park, Highline, Olympic, Peninsula, Spokane (Institute for Extended Learning), and Whatcom. Grant awards ranged from $6,000 to $10,900 to cover costs of expanding child care capacity during winter and spring quarters, 1999. Colleges were reimbursed for actual costs only. Funding ended June 30, 1999.

**Winter and spring child care enrollments:**

- Significant gains in child care service were made in spring quarter when the colleges were able to announce the service prior to the beginning of the quarter so that parents could plan their courses accordingly.

**Results:**

- Seven colleges served, on average, about 20 additional children in the evenings.
- 23 percent of the families using college child care services also received a child care subsidy from DSHS.

**Lessons Learned:**

- Parents need to know child care hours well in advance to plan their schedules accordingly. In the pilots, center directors reported that students typically set their class schedules two to three months prior to the quarter they will attend.
- Centers need even more advance time, to publicize the center hours and hire staff.
- Under Washington State licensing rules, children can be in licensed care a maximum of 10 hours per day. This is a problem for parents who work a full day and then enroll in evening classes.
- Directors were also concerned about security, emergency lighting, janitorial services, providing full meals, and increased equipment demands during evening hours and weekends.

**What the future holds:**

- A survey has been mailed to each college requesting information about the college's ability to expand and/or build child care capacity. The results will provide a current picture of the status of child care in the system and can be used in discussion with the WorkFirst partners to plan child care to welfare clients. The survey will be returned to the SBCTC on September 15, 1999. A copy is attached.